Prospects for Afri conflict resolution in the next millenniu South Africa's view

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ABSTRACT

The tragic events in Liberia (1990 alia (1992) and Rwanda (1994) evoked a rethinking on the pivotal role assi the United Nations and the international community in African conflict reso Subsequently, there emerged clarion calls for African solutions to African c , with foreign intervention only playing a complementary role. This unfold events put a democratic South Africa, a former pariah state, in a good stead e this initiative in sub-Saharan Africa.

So far, South Africa s circumspect s elicited mixed reactions from concerned parties within and outside her ter boundaries. In this paper, the nature of South Africa s involvement in sub t conflicts is discussed. The main objective is to highlight factors which noulded South Africa s intervention, and their impact on her perceptions ab spects for future African initiatives in the twenty-first century.

1. INTRODUCTION

The peaceful end of the Cold War changed the world in different and profound ways (See, for example Boutros-Ghali 1992:5-7). Bipolarity, for example, gave way to unipolarity. However, this post-Cold War scenario is likely to be ephemeral as the political clout of the United States (US) continues to be challenged. This is precisely because the circumstances in which the military strength of the US remains effective continue to diminish gradually. US hegemony continues to be challenged as powers like Germany, Japan, and China gradually ascend in economic power relative to that of the US (Kegley & Wittkopf 1995:104-106).

In addition, the end of the Cold war adversely affected third world countries as they became more marginalised by the West (Bush & Szeftel 1995:291-293; Williams 1997:134; Neethling 1998:27). In the light of the changes brought by the end of the Cold War, economic considerations superseded political considerations. This then changed the focus of the West to the developing countries in Latin America and South East Asia. The first world countries were also pre-occupied with enticing former communist countries in Eastern Europe and with containing potential conflicts in the former Soviet Union.

In his gloomy assessment of Africa s position, Deng had this to say:

> Africans are increasingly being told that, given the resources in the world, shrinking as they are, and the tendency of withdrawal and isolationism on the part of the wealthier industrialised countries of the West, they will have to rely on themselves primarily and whatever help they can expect from the outside will be minimal, targeted at specific situations. This limited help will naturally be motivated by the values of those who are coming to assist. Accordingly, the degree to which a country lives up to the values of human rights, humanitarianism, democracy and the market economy will determine the degree to which it will receive support from outside.
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> (Deng 1996: 23)

In the light of these changes, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) adopted the Declaration of Fundamental Changes, which moves from the premise that Africa has to assume responsibility for its own affairs. As a follow up to this, in Cairo in 1993, the OAU adopted the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution (MCPMR) (Jan 1997:13).

Earlier on, in 1992, the United Nations (UN) decided to review its strategy for conflict resolution and peacekeeping. Non-payment of contributions coupled with the reluctance of Western countries to commit their military personnel in hazardous peacekeeping operations (in Africa) also made it imperative for the UN to review its strategy (Boutros-Ghali 1992:28,41). Boutros-Ghali s *Agenda for Peace*, the policy document on UN peacekeeping, came as a direct response to these challenges. This document, inter alia, called for the partial delegation of peace-keeping duties to regional organisations (Boutros-Ghali 1992:chap 7). However, the events in Somalia and Rwanda showed that many of the recommendations of the UN s *Agenda for Peace* are, in fact, implausible.

In the light of these developments, a democratic South Africa as a dominant member state within the Southern African Development Community (SADC) seemed to be in good stead to be in the forefront of renewed moves towards bringing African solutions to African conflicts (Jan 1997:13; McGowan & Ahwireng-Obeng 1998:1-3). However, this proved not to be an easy task at all, for South Africa carried with her a considerable baggage of the past (See, amongst others, Landsberg 1996:1670-1671; Gwexe 1996:29-32).

To mark a clean break with the past, South Africa, among other things, has had to transform herself from a pariah state into a first among the equals in Southern Africa. In the process, South Africa adopted a remarkably ambivalent foreign policy towards the region and indeed the rest of the continent.[2]

This paper will start off with a brief review of recent attempts — both foreign and African — in conflict resolution in this continent, to be followed with an overview of South Africa s endeavours. It will be argued that South Africa s conception of African conflict resolution falls short of meeting the heightened expectations in the continent as a whole; that South Africa s position is influenced by the magnitude of daunting domestic challenges which will, for some foreseeable future, continue to drain much of her meagre resources; and that in pursuit of legitimate interests abroad, South Africa will nevertheless be impelled to fulfil her continental obligations.

This paper will then conclude that without substantial financial backing from the West, particularly the US, South Africa will remain pessimistic over the prospects for African conflict resolution in the next millennium.

2. CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN AFRICA IN THE 1990S: NEW PATTERNS, RISING DANGERS?

The thaw of the Cold War in 1989 and the emergence of the conflicts in Liberia, Somalia and Rwanda evoked calls for a re-assessment of the orthodox view that a resolution of African conflicts relies on excessive international intervention.[3] Such intervention was said to come from the UN, the US and the former colonial powers. However, profound global changes engendered by the end of the Cold War brought crisis in this view to the fore.

Since the end of the Cold War, three separate events in Africa stood out to expose the major flaws of this view. The first was failure of the international community in 1990 to intervene in resolving the civil war in Liberia. When it became abundantly clear to West African states that the anticipated foreign intervention was not forthcoming, drastic steps were taken to initiate regional moves to resolve the conflict. Given the urgency of the situation, it goes without saying that such hastily arranged moves were fraught with problems.

Another event was the breakout of an ethnic conflict, plunging Somalia into a bloody civil war in 1992. Following a scathing criticism for callousness while Samuel Doe s egregious regime embarked on a systematic slaughter of civilians in Liberia, the international community under the auspices of the UN and the US wasted no time in intervening in Somalia. This time around, their intervention was labelled by commentators as excessive. In the light of this, it is not surprising that the operation in Somalia was fraught with problems as well.

The third, and the most tragic, event was a notably minimal intervention of the international community in a civil war between the ethnic Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda earlier on in 1994. As will be shown hereunder, each of the subsequent peacekeeping missions had its own fair share of problems.

The Liberian debacle

Events that led to the recent conflict in Liberia are well documented elsewhere[4] and will, in fact, not be repeated here. However, for the purposes of this paper, a synopsis of the main events will be made hereunder.

The civil war in Liberia started on the 24th of December, 1989, when Charles Taylor s group, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), invaded Liberia.

That invasion was a direct expression of the people s disillusionment with the despotic regime of Samuel Doe, which ascended into power under dubious circumstances in 1980. Since then, the paranoia of Doe s regime manifested itself in waves of acts of brutality which this regime was prone to unleash against its imagined or real enemies, particularly civilians from the Gio and Mano ethnic groups. Amongst the most gruesome acts was the 1985 Monrovia beach massacre of the masterminds of the abortive coup in 1985, led by Thomas Quiwonkpa (Sesay 1996:36).

In his analysis of the causes of this civil war, Sesay (1996:36-37) did not hesitate to factor in tribalism, introduced by Doe s regime. For example, its bureaucracy, army, security forces and the public services were teeming with members of his ethnic group, the Krahn. It is not surprising that Quiwonkpa, the mastermind of the failed coup in 1985, was from a rival ethnic group, the Gio, from the Nimba county. Other ethnic groups were the Mandigos and the Mano. All these groups were later united in their cause to avenge years of maltreatment by Doe s regime.[5]

Given the number of failed coup attempts by the NPFL in the 1980s and the ruthless manner in which Doe s regime dealt with its opposition, the 1989 invasion was taken flippantly for a start. However, it was this attack which ignited the bloodiest civil war ever in Liberia.

In the light of this carnage, the failure of the international community to intervene in Liberia came as a great surprise. Sesay corroborated this view:

> The failure of the US to intervene came as a disappointment to many, but left some in the hope that the rest of the international community would do something to stop the carnage. In particular, people pinned hopes on the United Nations which, in the aftermath of the end of the cold war superpower rivalry, appeared to have reinvented itself and seemed competent to handle issues that threatened international peace and security. However, almost three years after the fighting and despite calls from some quarters for a direct intervention, the UN was conspicuously absent from the Liberian scene.
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> (Sesay, 1996:40-41)

As alluded to in the foregoing quotation, a bombshell was dropped by the US when she stressed that the civil war in Liberia was purely an internal affair and did not warrant a direct US invasion. This was unexpected, given the strategic importance of Liberia, and the special relationships between the two during the 1980s (Sesay, 1996:40; Williams, 1997:136).

In the light of this gross irresponsibility, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) decided to form a monitoring group — ECOMOG. Maj Gen Ishola Williams gave us a broad picture of how the prevalent atmosphere of desperation led to the formation of ECOMOG:

> The situation required an urgent response, but the Liberian issue was ignored. The UN was engrossed in addressing the Gulf war. The United States had other priorities. West Africa was pushed to take the initiative. Immediately questions were asked whether ECOWAS was justified in creating ECOMOG, the ECOWAS monitoring and observation group, and in intervening in Liberia.
>
> (Williams 1996:80)

ECOMOG was a brain-child of Nigeria. Other participating countries were Anglophone countries like Ghana, Sierra Leone, Gambia and Guinea. When ECOMOG was set up in August 1990, it was hoped that its mission in Liberia would last for twelve months. Within that period ECOMOG intended to have opened routes for much needed humanitarian aid; to have established a buffer zone around the capital Monrovia to enable the discussion of a cease-fire; and to have taken over security duties while an interim government was being established to facilitate national reconciliation and oversee a democratic return to normal life (Williams 1996:80). To this end, a first contingent of 3 500 thousand troops from the five ECOWAS countries was deployed in Liberia on the 22nd of August 1990.[6]

ECOMOG s case was unique in the sense that it represented the only example in the world of a regionally-based peacekeeping force sent on a peacekeeping mission within the same region. However, this turned out to be its Achilles heel. For one thing, from its inception ECOMOG had to grapple with a legitimacy problem. This legitimacy crisis was precipitated by the fact that Charles Taylor, who controlled 90% of the country, objected to ECOMOG s intervention. Taylor stuck to his word as he attacked the peace keepers. This then compelled ECOMOG to change its modus operandi from peacekeeping to peace-enforcement. This situation was exacerbated when Samuel Doe, on his way to ECOMOG headquarters, was captured, tortured, and killed by Prince Johnson — a leader of the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL) faction that defected from the NPFL in May 1990. ECOMOG s failure to prevent this incident of the 10th of September, 1990, led to the collapse of a temporary cease-fire brokered by ECOWAS. In the aftermath of this, Taylor then threatened to seize the capital Monrovia at all costs. ECOMOG was then compelled to use force to stop him (Barrett 1993:638-640).

Generally, the limited success of ECOMOG was evidenced by the fact that in 1994, 150 000 people were slain and 750 000 more were refugees in neighbouring states and over a million were displaced internally (Sesay, 1996:44). Another shred of evidence is the fact that out of thirteen brokered cease-fires, none of them was adhered to for a considerable period of time.

This bleak assessment can be attributed to a regional and international dimension of the Liberian conflict. Notable here was the external financial and military support rendered to the warring factions. For example, according to Sesay, there is an overwhelming evidence to the fact that countries like C te d Ivoire, Libya, and Burkina Faso rendered the required support to Charles Taylor. During the first year or so of the conflict, C te d Ivoire went to the extent of blocking any discussion of the Liberian crisis by the UN Security Council. This was done so to give Taylor ample time to ascend into power and ensure a stable neighbour. Taylor s realisation of this state of affairs petrified him; he remained intransigent and strongly objected to ECOMOG intervention. Taylor s uncompromising stance can be linked to a perception within NPFL circles that by calling for a peaceful settlement, ECOMOG intended to turn NPFL away from the imminent victory. This factor inhibited the success of the ECOMOG mission in Liberia. This assertion affirms Masson and Fett s analysis (1996:549) of the probability of victory, which posits that:

> Any factor that gives either G or R a substantially greater probability of victory than its rival decreases the likelihood of a negotiated settlement because the dominant party will be less interested in a settlement if victory appears inevitable.[7]

The operation in Liberia brought to the fore new patterns and rising dangers of peacekeeping in the 1990s: up to September 1992, 61 ECOMOG soldiers, made up of 36 Nigerians, 9 Ghanaians, 12 Guineans, 2 Sierra Leoneans and 2 Gambians, had been killed in action. Thirty seven others — 22 Nigerians, 1 Ghanaian, 12 Guineans and 2 Sierra Leoneans — were killed just before September 1992. In addition, two Guineans and one Sierra Leonean were also missing in action during this period.[8]

Case study: Somalia

The reluctance of the UN to intervene in Liberia, coupled with its alacrity to intervene in the Gulf, raised questions about the impartiality of the UN. Africa s feeling of having been marooned was further accentuated when the UN decided to get involved in Yugoslavia in 1992. So when an internecine warfare plunged Somalia

into a stateless condition in 1992,[9] the impartiality of the UN was subjected to an acid test. This time around there was no way out for the UN: it could not risk being accused of upholding double standards. For this specific reason, the UN then decided to intervene in Somalia.[10] Kapundu (1996:58) gives us the graphic details of the circumstances which led to the ultimate UN intervention in Somalia (UNOSOM:UN Organisation in Somalia). He said:

> The United Nations did not go into Somalia because it wanted to. There was a great deal of hesitation. The Security Council had taken a decision to go into Yugoslavia. The Security Council had refused, or had been blocked, from taking any decision on Liberia and the OAU and its own subsidiary organisations had to go into Liberia alone, with limited resources and so people began to ask why was the United Nations prepared to go into Yugoslavia and not Somalia. The international media also portrayed horrific incidents coming from Somalia and so the United Nations decided to see whether it could do something in Somalia.

So when UN/US intervention in Somalia commenced December 1992, it had lofty ideas of saving millions of Somalis from starvation and restoring peace and stability. However, this operation enjoyed only a limited success as it was punctuated by the killings of twenty-five Pakistani peacekeepers on the 6th of June, 1996, and eighteen US Army Rangers in October 1993. In the aftermath of these killings the US unilaterally decided to withdraw its military personnel from Somalia with effect from March 1995. The three year operation in Somalia also highlighted the rising dangers of peacekeeping operations in the 1990s. Between 1992 and 1995, 130 peacekeepers died and this was the highest fatality rate in the history of UN peacekeeping (Woodhouse 1996:129). UNOSOM II never achieved its objectives[11] and had to be ignominiously called off in 1995.

Case study: Rwanda

To the UN, the foregoing UN operation was salutary in the narrow sense that when the civil war broke out in Rwanda, UN intervention was reduced to a bare minimum. At its peak, the UN force serving with UNAMIR (UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda) stood at 5 500.[12] This small number incapacitated the UN as UNAMIR could not be in a position to prevent the genocide of the Tutsis and moderate Hutus, which was at its peak during the first few days of the fighting. For example, between the 28th and the 29th of April, 1994, 250 000 refugees flooded into Tanzania. Later on, others flooded into the neighbouring Zaire, precipitating one of

the worst humanitarian crises ever handled by the UNHCR (UN High Commissioner for Refugees).

UNAMIR proved to be a dismal failure: it could not prevent the genocide stated above, or ensure the distribution of humanitarian aid to the refugee camps like Goma in Eastern Zaire, nor did it solicit the support of the Rwandan Patriotic Front which, after assuming power, equally criticised UNAMIR for failing to prevent the genocide. When UNAMIR was withdrawn in March 1996, the vast majority of Rwandan refugees were still displaced.

A blame for the tragic situation can be squarely put at the door of the UN which, because of the Somali fatigue, was not prepared to intervene. Tom Woodhouse (1996:129-130) felicitously put this when he said:

> While in Somalia the UN came under criticism for intervening too much militarily, in Rwanda it came under attack for not intervening enough. In April 1994, following the killing of 10 Belgian soldiers serving with UNAMIR, the force was reduced to a small staff of just 270 when the genocide of Tutsis and moderate Hutus was taking place.

UNAMIR indicated that the UN did not do a proper analysis of the situation on the ground. After failing to prevent the genocide in April 1994 in which up to a million people were shot, hacked or burned to death, it equally failed to deal with the humanitarian crisis that ensued. Conditions in the refugee camps in Kigali and Goma deteriorated because, amongst other things, there was no clear co-operation between the UN agencies and the NGOs.[13]

As alluded to earlier on, the three operations brought to the fore the changing patterns of conflict resolution endeavours in Africa. For one, during this period, more than ever, the intervening parties were forced to rely on direct military intervention, since diplomacy and economic sanctions, as it were, became more and more inappropriate for these deep-rooted conflicts.

Also, these emerging patterns subjected the pacifiers to a great strain. This was due to a simple reason that unlike diplomacy, direct military intervention required the intervening parties to commit a considerable share of their meagre resources to the peacekeeping operations. As a result, to mitigate the effects of the high costs that are invariably incurred in operations of this nature, the intervening parties, as was shown in Liberia and Somalia, have been tempted to change their modus operandi

from peacekeeping to peace enforcement.[14] This can be attributed to a firm belief that doing so, as opposed to cajoling the belligerent factions to reconcile with one another, takes a relatively short period and saves a considerable amount of resources.

Furthermore, new patterns of conflict resolution endeavours in Africa have been brought about by a tendency on the part of the pacifiers to vacillate between multilateral and unilateral interventions and to treat these as analytically distinct forms of intervention. The three case studies brought this fact to the fore. For example, the situation in Liberia evoked multilateral (ECOMOG) intervention, and that in Somalia unilateral (US) intervention. The situation in Rwanda was rather bizarre, oscillating between the two. Initially, there was a significant Belgian intervention. However, after the withdrawal of Belgium, UNAMIR was perhaps too weak an operation to warrant classification as a multilateral operation under the aegis of the UN.

In a nutshell, the changing patterns of conflict resolution endeavours in Africa have actually made it imperative for us to factor-in a wide range of factors in our analysis of the prospects for African conflict resolution in the next millennium. These include, inter alia, the impact of (conflicting) values on the successes of mediation in intra-state conflicts; equipping military personnel with specific skills to enable them to optimally play a peacekeeping role; issuing a clear mandate to the peacekeepers; as well as acknowledging the significant role of a civil society in the effective implementation of post-conflict peace-building.[15]

At this juncture, it needs to be reiterated that value differences, for example, have made ideological conflicts in general and ethnic conflicts in particular not to be amenable to mediation.[16] The three cases above have, in varying degrees, shown this. On the one hand, ethnic conflicts in Rwanda (and Burundi) have been simmering for a considerable period of time and up to now, a lasting solution to them is not yet in sight.[17] On the other, ideological conflicts (like the one in Angola) invariably reduce the successes of mediation to a bare minimum.

3. RE-EVALUATING CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN AFRICA: SOUTH AFRICA S PERCEPTIONS?

These afore-mentioned tragic events highlighted a dire need for the OAU to be proactive in resolving African conflicts. In 1994, following the adoption of MCPMR in Egypt in 1993, this idea was gradually beginning to crystallise into something more concrete. Since the adoption of the MCPMR, the OAU has helped

in diffusing potentially explosive situations, as in Nigeria for example; in dispatching military observers to Burundi; in observing the elections in Congo, Togo, Gabon, amongst other places; and in ensuring that the African states made their contributions to the UN s peacekeeping operation at the peak of the genocide in Rwanda (Jan 1997:14). In addition, pre-eminent individuals within the OAU, like its Secretary-General, Salim Ahmed Salim, began to preach that an effective implementation of the MCPMR depended mainly on the co-operation of all member states. Particular reference was made to the significant role of countries like South Africa in the south and Egypt in the north. The rationale is that their industrial development, presumably, puts them in a much better position to act as logistic centres for OAU peacekeeping operations.

Furthermore, scholars like Ali Mazrui argued that a panacea to African conflicts would be a formation of an African Security Council composed of five pivotal regional states (Egypt, Ethiopia, Nigeria, South Africa and Zaire) which would, presumably, have the required capacity for such interventions (Woodhouse 1996:135).

With all this having been said, where does South Africa stand in this regard?

Here it needs to be unequivocally stated that South Africa is a unique country expected to play a pivotal role in a vastly changing world. South Africa s uniqueness, according to Sina Odugbeni (1995:701-703),[18] can be attributed to a number of factors. One, apartheid in South Africa was regarded as a crime against humanity and evoked struggles world wide. For this specific reason, the demise of apartheid drew world-wide attention. Two, the peaceful elections in 1994 were regarded as miraculous by the foreign observers who flocked into the country, anticipating that the election would be marred by violence and would not be free and fair. Three, there was a perception that the struggle against apartheid in South Africa was a Pan-African one. For this reason, Africans in the Diaspora could not regard themselves as free while their brothers were still languishing under the apartheid yoke in South Africa. Given the euphoria that trailed in the wake of South Africa s liberation, there were heightened expectations that South Africa would help Africa overcome her challenges — hunger, civil strife and democratisation.

Generally, South Africa seemed to be in good stead to rise to the occasion. South Africa had a strong economical clout as her GNP equalled 36% of the combined GNPs of all countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. In the political sphere, South Africa acted as a role model as her peaceful transition gave impetus to democratisation in Southern Africa (Odugbeni 1994:701-703).

Pretoria s dilemma

Since her liberation in April 1994, South Africa has had to transform herself from a pariah state into an equal partner (in Southern Africa). This then wrought enormous changes in South Africa s foreign policy. Noticeable here is the cornerstone of South Africa s foreign policy: the protection and promotion of human rights and democracy. South Africa, as result, is more vocal on issues like banning the proliferation of nuclear weapons as well as the use of limpet mines. Environmental issues also seem to be topping the shopping list of South Africa s foreign policy.

In the light of these changes, a democratic South Africa adopted an ambivalent policy towards the region and indeed the rest of the continent (Hanekom 1997:7). This was clearly reflected in the manner in which South Africa intervened in subsequent conflicts right across Africa. South Africa s circumspect intervention, as dictated to by her evolving foreign policy, evoked mixed reactions not only within the country, but on the continent as a whole. Chris Landsberg corroborated this view. He said:

> Some critics of the ANC government have been catching on to what they believe is South Africa s retreat from peacemaking on the African continent. Others will go as far as to complain that Pretoria s general involvement in Africa s affairs is not as nearly as pronounced as many in the continent would wish or had expected, following the demise of apartheid.
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> (Landsberg 1996:1670)

As will be shown hereunder, there is an overwhelming evidence on how South Africa s evolving foreign policy subjected her to a great strain with regard to her conflict resolution endeavours in Africa. Perhaps one tenet of South Africa s foreign policy is to stress diplomacy rather than military intervention. The architects of South Africa s evolving foreign policy seem to be having a strong belief in the maxim that diplomacy makes a greater contribution in African conflict resolution than more ambitious but sometimes less successful alternatives — as was revealed elsewhere in Africa (Landsberg 1996:1670).

This was evidenced by South s Africa use of quiet diplomacy when there was a royal coup in Lesotho in 1994. South Africa wasted no time in uniting with other erstwhile Frontline States, particularly Botswana and Zimbabwe, calling for the immediate reversal of the coup. Through diplomacy, South Africa, together with her partners in the region, managed to contain a potentially explosive situation as the democratically elected government of Ntsu Mokhetle was reinstated. South Africa s

manner of intervention here was reinforced by the need on the part of South Africa to transform herself from a pariah state in Southern Africa. As a result South Africa places a high premium on multilateral response. For this reason, South Africa perceives the SADC as an institutional framework for this.

In addition to quiet diplomacy, South Africa s foreign policy establishment appears to have been overwhelmed by President Mandela s personalising of South Africa s foreign relations (Onadipe 1996:1672-1673). This factor, as was evidenced in November 1995, has a direct bearing on the manner in which South Africa intervenes in conflict situations in Africa. South Africa s disastrous Nigeria policy vindicates this claim.

Perhaps, a brief historical background to the situation in Nigeria will make this point more clear. South Africa s involvement in Nigeria started long before the execution of the Ogoni Nine. President Mandela devoted a lot of his time in diffusing the crisis in Nigeria, following Gen Babangida s annulment of the 1993 elections. The annulment precipitated widespread civil unrest, leading to the dismissal of Babangida and the ascension of a new military regime under Sani Abacha, following the demise of a civilian government which Babangida hastily installed as he made his quick exit. The new military regime detained Chief Moshood Abiola, widely believed to have won the 1993 elections. This arrest took place after Chief Abiola declared himself as the president of Nigeria in June 1994.

South Africa initially responded when President Mandela dispatched Archbishop Desmond Tutu to Nigeria. Tutu s mission was to initiate a dialogue with the Abacha regime and to negotiate for the release of Chief Abiola. Abacha and his rogues were intransigent and Tutu s mission failed. This became abundantly clear when a tribunal tried, and subsequently sentenced to death, the former head of state, Gen Obasanjo, and thirty-nine others for plotting a coup. This act evoked further pleas for clemency.

This time, President Mandela sent the Deputy President Thabo Mbeki, who had a cordial relationship with that country when he acted as the ANC s representative in Lagos during the 1970s. This mission was not successful either: It was followed by the trial of the Ogoni Nine. This time around, the military tribunal sentenced Ken Saro Wiwa, an internationally acclaimed writer and an environmental activist, together with his eight compatriots to death amid clarion calls for clemency.

At this point, President Mandela intervened personally. He telephonically contacted

the highest authorities of the Abacha government in Abuja. This phenomenon continued until President Mandela s departure for the Commonwealth summit in New Zealand. Throughout, President Mandela remained optimistic and this prompted him to adopt a more soft approach towards the egregious Abacha regime. This, however, turned out to be his Achilles heel: the Ogoni Nine were hanged amidst all those calls for clemency. This clearly indicated that, contrary to majority expectations, South Africa s mission in Nigeria had, in fact, failed. All the frantic attempts that South Africa made afterwards could not salvage the situation.[19]

Furthermore, South Africa s evolving foreign policy seems to indicate that South Africa prefers to engage in high-risk peacekeeping operations only under the auspices of the UN and the OAU. For this specific reason, a democratic South Africa has been careful not to become involved in peacekeeping efforts beyond her immediate region. Thus the South African Government refused to send peacekeeping forces to Rwanda in 1994. On the contrary, South Africa only offered humanitarian aid to Rwanda, and logistical support to Mozambique during the November 1994 elections.

The Rwandan civil war could have presented to South Africa a golden opportunity to prove her peacekeeping capabilities. However, South Africa let it slip away. Why? One (and perhaps the only plausible) explanation is that South Africa has no experience in international peacekeeping. In the situations in Angola, Mozambique, Rwanda and Burundi, South Africa did not play this role; other players — the UN, France and Belgium — did. Even in Southern Africa, other countries like Zimbabwe and Zambia seem to be better off in this regard, compared to South Africa (See Kapoma 1996:1-4).

Another tenet of South Africa s foreign policy is neutrality. According to South Africa s version of conflict resolution, this tenet entails talking to all parties in the conflict. This is in line with a democratic South Africa s bottom line: respect of human rights and provision of humanitarian assistance and logistical support to complement international peacekeeping efforts. South Africa s belief in neutrality became clear, when South Africa, in an attempt to diffuse the situation in Angola, held talks with UNITA[20] in Umtata (*Daily Dispatch* 1997:2). So far, South Africa s attempts have only been moderate as there are allegations that UNITA is once again mobilising its forces (See Gordon 1997:24; Gordon 1998:4; Gordon & Barrell 1998:4). Similarly, in Sudan South Africa has so far managed to talk to the leaders of the major stake-holders in the Sudanese conflict.[21]

Perhaps the 1997 conflict in Zaire (now known as the Democratic Republic of Congo) highlighted the dilemma of South Africa s foreign policy: if South Africa establishes herself as a centrifugal force in Southern Africa, she would be accused of harbouring hegemonic aspirations; if she adopted a moderate, isolationist approach, she would be criticised for callousness.

Given this dilemma, the Nigerian fiasco and moderate success in Angola, South Africa s role as peacemaker in Zaire indicated that South Africa s search for a foreign policy victory still goes on. However, the Zairean endeavour did not pay off either. Evidence to prove this is overwhelming.

South Africa s diplomatic shuffle in Zaire started in March, 1997, when South Africa hosted Zairean envoy Honore Ngbanda and opposition leader Laurent Kabila. In these secret preliminary talks four items were discussed: the status of the talks and the weight of the resolutions taken; a cease-fire between warring factions in Zaire; the combination of a South African-led initiative with the OAU and UN peace efforts; and the role of external forces in finding a solution (Hartley 1997a:27). The subsequent talks arranged by South Africa could not reconcile the warring factions. In the end, a military solution prevailed.

A chronology of the events in Zaire clearly indicated that South Africa s intervention did not differ markedly from the previous cases. For one thing, there were still vestiges of the personalisation of the foreign policy establishment by President Nelson Mandela. For example, in his attempt to maintain sound personal relations with (the late) Mobutu Sese Seko, President Mandela, in a manner reminiscent of Nigeria, has on more than one occasion preferred to rely on direct telephone conversation with him (Mobutu). One such incident took place after the preliminary talks in April (Hartley 1997b:4).

Also, as was the case in Rwanda, South Africa remained reluctant to commit her troops in a peacekeeping initiative. For example, the deputy minister of Foreign Affairs, Aziz Pahad, was quoted in April 1997 as having said that South Africa remained committed to involvement in an international peacekeeping initiative. However, that commitment went down with the caveat that such initiative would not necessarily involve troops (Hartley 1997b:4). This statement affirmed South Africa s foreign policy tenet that unless proximity dictates otherwise, South Africa will commit her troops in peacekeeping operations only under the aegis of the UN and OAU.

A sublime feature of South Africa s involvement in Zaire was the working in tandem with the US. When the crisis in Zaire was rife, the vice president, Thabo Mbeki, was said to have been in close contact with his US counterpart Al Gore.[22] However, even this strategy does not seem to have salvaged South Africa from her foreign policy dilemma (See Mamdani 1997:10).

4. CONCLUSION

A lasting solution to Africa s conflicts now, it seems, has to come from within Africa herself. This was clearly indicated by ECOMOG in Liberia. Although ECOMOG was not a resounding success, many Liberians today are still indebted to it. Was it not for ECOMOG s intervention, many of them would not be alive today.

However, because conflict resolution and peacekeeping is a costly exercise, continued support from the UN, US and other Western, particularly the Nordic, countries will be necessary to facilitate African initiatives. The international community can, for example, adequately provide the much needed financial and logistical support and expertise.

Perhaps the events in Somalia and Rwanda have taught us a lesson in this regard: peacekeeping or conflict resolution should not be a monopoly of the military, but should involve many facets of society, including politicians, civil society, and humanitarian organisations. In addition, African conflict resolution needs to involve regional and sub-regional organisations and powers.

The fact that this harsh reality is beginning to dawn on the minds of major donor countries and agencies, bodes well for African conflict resolution in the next millennium. The UN, for example, has come up with a special initiative on Africa. In addition, the fact that the Secretary-General of the UN, Kofi Annan, comes from Africa, augurs well for African future initiatives (See, for example, Annan 1997:31-33). Furthermore, the US, through the 1994 African Conflict Resolution Act of 1994, has authorised $1,5 billion between 1995 and 1998. In line with this, the US is further proposing the setting up of a 10 000 strong Africa Crisis Reaction Force.

Despite all this, the ultimate responsibility is still on African regional organisations and powers. As shown above, the OAU has already made some remarkable improvements in this regard and these will not be reiterated here. Rather, a thorny

question, which the remainder of this paper will attempt to respond to, is: Where does South Africa stand on this issue?

Lest the impression created so far be that South Africa cannot legitimately pursue her foreign policy goals if she does so at the expense of African conflict resolution initiatives, let me quickly point out that this is obviously not the case. South Africa, like any other state actors in the international system, needs to vigorously pursue her foreign policy goals here and abroad. There is, for example, nothing sinister with South Africa vying for the much coveted position of a permanent African representative in the UN Security Council. Rather, what is the real issue here is that there are conspicuous discrepancies between her foreign policy goals and the manner in which they are pursued. As the shopping list of her foreign policy indicates, South Africa is particularly concerned with attracting foreign investment and establishing more trading partners. Next to these are the promotion of human rights and the prevention of environmental degradation. Africa seems to be at the bottom of the shopping list of South Africa s foreign policy. The ad hoc bases on which South Africa attends to the problems that keep on nagging this continent leave one really wondering as to whether South Africa does have a policy towards Africa at all (See Hanekom 1997:7; Barrell 1998:6). The haphazard manner in which South Africa has responded to the renewed conflicts in Lesotho[23] and in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)[24] has once again brought this critical question to the fore.

What are the implications of this state of affairs on African conflict resolution and South Africa s perceptions thereof? As pointed out earlier on, South Africa has not been in a position, for example, to successfully reconcile economic objectives, on the one hand, and the protection of fundamental human rights as well the promotion of democracy on the other. There are a number of cases that attest to this assertion. The Nigerian debacle is one example. The other case — outside Africa — is that of Indonesia. Noticeable here is the fact that because of ambitions to strengthen trade links with Indonesia, South Africa (much to the dislike of East Timor) failed to adopt a tough stance against that country s gross violation of human rights in East Timor.

What South Africa can (and should) do is to vigorously pursue her foreign policy, particularly when the values avowedly stated in her foreign policy dictate so. In addition, South Africa needs to come up with a holistic approach vis- -vis *ad hoc* bases when dealing with this continent. Failure to do so can result in South Africa not only ignominiously forfeiting her foreign policy goals, but also failing to meet (reasonably) heightened expectations in the rest of the continent.

Unfortunately, South Africa seems to be brushing this fact aside. South Africa s policy (like any other policy) remains strongly moulded by her daunting domestic challenges.[25] Therefore, South Africa s prevalent view that she is not yet ready to lead the formation of the Africa Crisis Reaction Force as suggested by the US, I believe, does not come as a surprise. But, the same view is particularly disquieting and disconcerting to the critics of South Africa, given the fact that the Africa Crisis Reaction Force would have presented her with a golden opportunity to reconnect with the rest of the continent.

It is perhaps due to these domestic challenges that South Africa has given the US idea of spearheading the formation of an African Crisis Reaction Force a wide berth.[26] For South Africa, anything beyond the level of involvement that she has displayed so far, will have to involve the UN and the US — financially or otherwise. This perception, which undoubtedly will have a direct impact on the prospects for African conflict resolution, is likely to last well into the next millennium.

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NOTES

1 Mr Gwexe is a lecturer in the Department of Political Studies at the University of Transkei, Umtata, South Africa.

2 For a detailed analysis of South Africa s evolving Foreign Policy, see, inter alia, Van Aardt 1996:107-119; Breytenbach 1997:274-277.

3 Unless stated otherwise, in this paper the term conflict will be used to refer to ethnic, religious, regional and other forms of conflict (Regan 1996:338), and the term conflict resolution will be broadly used to refer to preventive diplomacy, peace-keeping, peace-making, as well as post-conflict peace-building (Boutros-Ghali 1992:11-12).

4 See, amongst others, *West Africa*, No. 3911 (31 August-6 September, 1992):1470-1473; No. 3918 (19-25 October, 1992):1764-1766; No. 3936 (1-7 March, 1993):325-327; No. 3937 (8-14 March, 1993):369; No. 3957 (26 July-1 August, 1993):1292-1296; No. 3943 (19-25 April, 1993):638; No. 3984 (7-13 February, 1994):206-210; No. 4012 (22-28 August, 1994):1462-1465; No. 4098 (6-12 May, 1996):697-700; No. 4113 (19-25 August, 1996):1306-1311; No. 4124 (11-17 November, 1996):1750-1755.

5 *West Africa,* No. 3911 (31 August-6 September, 1992):1471.

6 Later on this number increased up to 10 000 and 12 000 troops. Nigeria was a major contributor in this regard. See Barrett 1993:638-640.

7 In this model, G represents an incumbent government, and R a rebel organisation. If we need to expound on this model, we can possibly think of the prevailing conflict situation in Angola and assert that G stands for the MPLA government, and R for the UNITA rebel movement. For detailed information on this model, see Mason & Fett 1996:546-550.

8 *West Africa*, No. 3911 (31 August-6 September, 1992):1471.

9 For a brief historical background of the conflict in Somalia and the initial UN response, see Omaar 1992:1382-1383.

10 *West Africa*, No. 3926 (14-20 December, 1992):2140-2141.

11 According to Woodhouse (1996:123), UNOSOM II had lofty goals of assisting the Somali people in rebuilding their shattered economy and social and political life, re-establishing the country s constitutional structure, achieving national reconciliation, and creating a Somali state based on democratic governance.

12 This small number stood in sharp contrast to the 500 000 the West deployed to evict Iraq from Kuwait in 1990, and the 55 000 men the West deployed in Bosnia (Lockwood 1995:15).

13 See *Africa Report*, November-December 1994:17-21.

14 However, this invariably comes at an exorbitant price as the impartiality of the peacekeepers is often clouded by the tendency of slipping through the Grey Zone . (For more information on this, see amongst others, Cilliers & Malan 1996:342; Neethling 1997:210).

15 Boutros-Ghali 1992:32-34 puts the whole notion of post-conflict peace-building in a proper perspective.

16 For more information on this view, see Regan 1996:347.

17 The chronology of events in these two countries of the Great Lakes region puts this in a proper perspective. In addition, the recent designs for peace in these two countries do not seem to be bringing a lasting solution to these ongoing conflicts. For more information in this regard, see, inter alia, Griggs 1997:4,18-25,28; *Sunday Times*, 10 August 1998:13.

18 South Africa s unique position in a vastly changing world is well documented elsewhere and will not be repeated here. Nevertheless, Sina Odugbeni s article is of particular interest in this regard as it sheds some light on how the rest of the continent perceived a democratic South Africa which emerged after the April 1994 elections. For a detailed analysis of these perceptions, see Odugbeni 1995:701-703.

19 Among other things, South Africa used her influence in the Commonwealth to call for the two-year suspension of Nigeria from this grouping. In addition, South Africa was the only country to insist on the imposition of sanctions on Nigeria. South Africa further withdrew her High Commissioner from Lagos in protest, along with some other countries. (For more information on this and subsequent attempts, see Onadipe 1996:1671-1673; Jason 1997:27; and also Woollacott 1997:15.)

20 Uni o Nacional para a Independ ncia Total de Angola.

21 Here Richard Cornwell looks at factors militating against President Nelson Mandela s recent attempts at negotiating a peaceful settlement in Sudan. For more information in this regard, see Cornwell 1997:30.

22 This state of affairs might be attributed to the fact that the US accords South Africa a special status. For example, since November 1994, the two countries established a bilateral commission. South Africa is the only country, apart from Russia, to have established a commission of this nature with the US. See Bully 1994:2027-2029; Hartley 1997b:4.

23 For more information on the post mortem of the recent Lesotho crisis, see, amongst others, *Daily Dispatch*, 11 August 1998:1; *Mail & Guardian*, 31 July-6 August 1998:6, 26 August-3 September 1998:6; 18-24 September 1998:3; and *Sunday Times*, 27 September 1998:4.

24 Since the beginning of August, 1998, the renewed conflict in the DRC has put South Africa in a quagmire. For more information in this regard, see, amongst others, *Daily Dispatch*, 7 August 1998:10, 11 August 1998:3, 24 August 1998:1, 31 August 1998:1; *Mail & Guardian*, 28 August-3 September 1998: 6-7; and *Sunday Times*, 30 August 1998:13.

25 South Africa s domestic challenges are well known and well documented elsewhere so that an in-depth analysis is not necessary here. For more information in this regard, see, amongst others, Gwexe 1996:44-53; *Daily Dispatch*, 14 March 1997:16; *Mail & Guardian*, 14-19 March 1997:12; *Indicator SA*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (Winter) 1994:64, Vol. 12, No. 13 (Winter) 1995:33; *Africa Insight*, Vol. 25, No. 4 1995:221; and *New African*, No. 326 (January) 1995:31.

26 For other possible reasons, see Cilliers & Malan 1996:339-346; *Mail & Guardian*, 29 August-4 September 1997:12; and *Sunday Times*, 27 October 1996:15.